



THE KNEELING POSITION

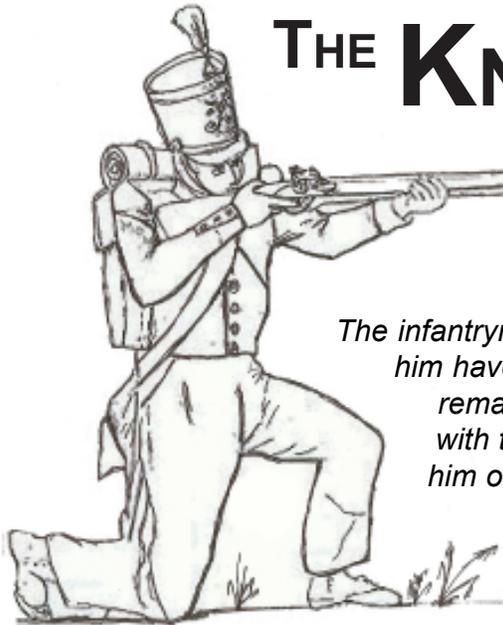


Figure 1

RUSSELL A. ENO

The infantryman's weapons and the technology and weapons systems that support him have evolved dramatically since the Revolutionary War, but his mission has remained by and large unchanged. It is still the infantryman who must close with the enemy by means of fire and maneuver in order to destroy or capture him or to repel his assault by fire, close combat, and counterattack. Central to this mission is the infantryman's ability to place accurate small arms fire on the enemy, and the Soldier who can master several firing positions stands a better chance of killing or incapacitating his adversary.

Learning the four fundamentals of marksmanship — a steady firing position, aiming, breath control, and trigger squeeze — and firing from the individual foxhole supported and basic prone unsupported firing positions will enable the Soldier to develop confidence in himself and his weapon. Once he has mastered these basic positions, he is ready to apply the four fundamentals to other more advanced firing positions. These include the alternate prone, kneeling supported, kneeling unsupported, and standing positions. Combat in specialized surroundings such as the urban environment, on mountainous terrain, or in forests may dictate other firing positions, but these will be mostly variations of the prone, kneeling, and standing modes. One of these firing positions — the kneeling — is receiving increased attention in today's marksmanship training, since it offers the best

opportunity for engaging targets while reducing Soldier's vulnerability.

Given the urban nature of the contemporary operational environment, the kneeling position offers a good compromise between the stability of the prone position and the ability to engage quickly, as from the standing mode. The prone is steady and reduces the Soldier's profile, but may restrict his field of vision on uneven ground, and while firing standing permits rapid engagement of targets it exposes the shooter to enemy fire and is less stable than any other position. The kneeling position reduces the shooter's visible profile, lets him better see around and over uneven terrain and rubble, and affords him a greater degree of stability. Once he has successfully engaged his target, the Soldier can rise and move out more rapidly from a kneeling mode than he can from the prone.

The kneeling position has been around for a long time, and predates

even the American Revolution. One of the earliest U.S. illustrations of how the kneeling position should look (Figure 1) appeared in *Infantry Tactics* in 1835. Note that, aside from lowering the shooter's profile, it offers little in the way of stability. Figure 2 is from *Hardee's Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics* dating from 1862 and shows the rifle supported by the left arm with the elbow resting on the knee. This, and the lowering of the right upper leg onto the heel, both steadies the aim and further lowers the shooter's profile. Upton's

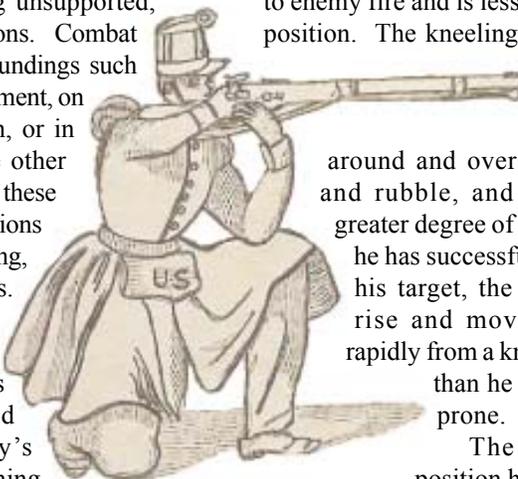


Figure 2

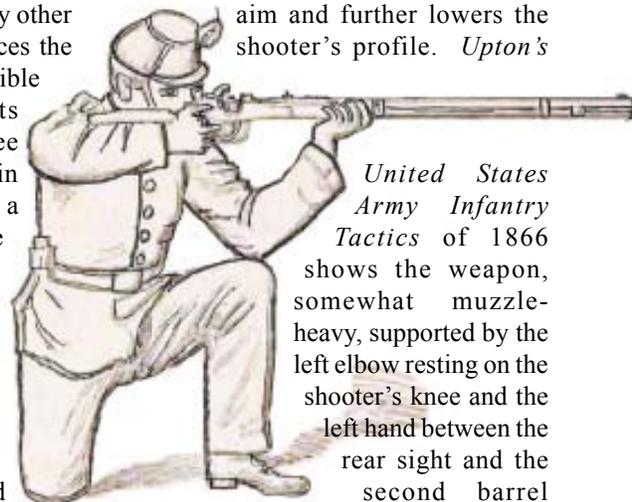


Figure 3

United States Army Infantry Tactics of 1866 shows the weapon, somewhat muzzle-heavy, supported by the left elbow resting on the shooter's knee and the left hand between the rear sight and the second barrel band, which



Figure 4



Figure 5

better controls side-to-side movement.

Few if any changes to the kneeling position took place until the turn of the century, when the United States Army recognized the value of the rifle sling as a component of marksmanship and began training troops in its use. Figure 4 shows the sling kneeling position of a Soldier firing the United States rifle, Model of 1917, one of two rifles issued to U.S. troops in World War I. Figure 5 shows the same position, this time using a building as support. Both are taken from the late Colonel Townsend Whelen's 1918 book, *The American Rifle*, and illustrate the stability and low silhouette possible with the kneeling position. The shooter sits on his right heel, the support hand is far enough forward to support the rifle at the point of balance, and the right forearm is parallel to the ground to facilitate a trigger pull straight to the rear.

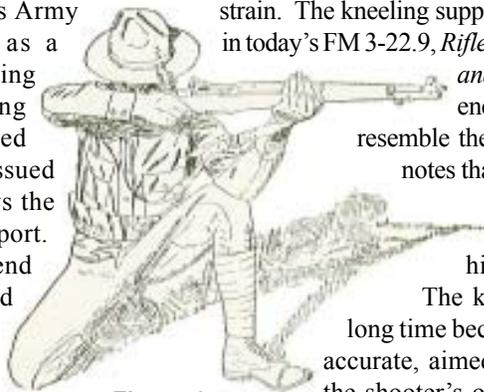


Figure 6

the kneeling position with sling shown in Figure 6, and authorizes sitting on the side of the right foot instead of the heel to reduce strain. The kneeling supported and unsupported positions illustrated in today's FM 3-22.9, *Rifle Marksmanship M16A1, M16A2/3, M16A4, and M4 Carbine*, (Figures 7 and 8) likewise encourage the use of the sling and generally

resemble the earlier FM 23-5 techniques. FM 3-22.9 notes that this position enables the Soldier to adjust his height as necessary to take advantage of available cover, something his predecessors probably did in every war.

The kneeling position has been with us for a long time because it is an effective means of delivering accurate, aimed fire against the enemy while reducing the shooter's own vulnerability. We have long known that effective fire is a function of accuracy rather than volume, because unless the enemy is killed or otherwise incapacitated he will remain a threat to our Soldiers, and will continue to impede our ability to accomplish the Infantry's mission.

Field Manual 23-5, published in 1940 to train Soldiers on the U.S. Rifle, Caliber .30, M1—the Garand to most of us—taught

Figure 7



Figure 8

